



# READY FIRST BRIGADE NEWSLETTER

COL Sean MacFarland, Commander  
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May 2006



## Ready First Combat Team Drives On

By: 1LT VanKirk

Throughout the past five months, the Ready First Combat team continued to improve their fighting positions and their Soldier skills. The Iraqi Army in Tal Afar also developed their soldier skills showing tremendous improvement since we arrived. The 3d Iraqi Army Division is now assuming responsibility for several areas in and around Tall Afar.

What does this mean for 1st Brigade? It means that just like any functioning Army family, it's time to move on. Because of the tremendous successes we were able to achieve in Tal Afar, as well as the ever building competence of Iraqi Security Forces

there, the Ready First Combat Team is tasked with the mission of securing and rebuilding another troubled town – this time in a city west of Baghdad in the Al Anbar Province called Ar Ramadi. Not all the units in the brigade will move initially. The main body of Task Force 2-37 will remain in Tal Afar and continue training with the Iraqi Army until they are ready to assume responsibility for the remainder of the city. Charlie Company 2-37 Armor, and Bravo Company 1-36 Infantry will come with the Brigade.

May has been filled with planning, packing and preparations for the move to Ramadi. Soldiers spent time re-zeroing their weapons, packing up their CHU's (containerized housing unit), mailing packages home and buying last minute necessities from the FOB Sykes PX. The move takes the brigade about 500 miles south and requires many ground convoys and helicopter flights to move the brigade.

Ramadi is one of the few remaining insurgent strongholds left in Iraq. Currently, Ramadi falls under the control of the 2nd Brigade, 28th Infantry Division from the Pennsylvania Army National Guard. As part of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, 2/28 ID is composed of several battalions of National Guard units from across the country, as well as a Marine element, the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines and the 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment (from the 101st Air Assault Division). 2/28 ID is scheduled to redeploy to Pennsylvania, but the 3/8 Marines and the 1st of the 506th Infantry will stay in Ramadi and continue to fight with us. We will also have two battalions and an MP platoon from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team join in as well. These units have been waiting in Kuwait for the last six months just looking for something to do. The units that will come to Ramadi are the 1st Battalion, 35th Armor Regiment and the 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment. Task Force 1-36 Infantry will continue to stay in Hit, just west of Ramadi.

The Ready First Combat Team is just what Ramadi needs. First Brigade brings several essentials to the fight: audacity, tenacity and professionalism. These fundamentals combined with the tactical and technical proficiency of all members of the brigade will ensure victory in the fight against the insurgency; bringing freedom and security to the people of Iraq.



*A Ready First convoy prepares to make the long trip to Ramadi*



*A patrol passes by the Saddam Mosque in Ar Ramadi, Iraq*



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## 1-36 INF “SPARTANS”



Another month has passed in the city of Hit. The Spartans continued to bring the fight to the enemy while expanding the footprint of operations to include more of the outlying towns and villages in the region.

Joint missions with special operations elements and marine reconnaissance in the city of Kubaysah resulted in the detention/elimination of several high value targets.

Kubaysah has long been a remote stronghold for insurgent operations in the AO.

With recent raids and patrols in the area, the Spartans have managed to deny this safe haven to the insurgents. Increased operations there as well as across the AO resulted in a decrease in the level of sophistication and prior coordination seen both in IED attacks and small arms ambushes.

The Spartans recently conducted an Iraqi Police (IP) and Iraqi Army (IA) recruiting drive in the town of Zuwayah. Well over 100 recruits were registered and sent on to training. The recruiting drive served to produce new security forces and also bolstered relations/presence in the Phurat region. The local Sheik who helped organize the drive will continue to be a valuable contact in the region. Cementing the relationship, the Spartans were able to get him to Baghdad for much needed medical treatment at the CSH.

Information flow from the local populace continues to increase as the locals become more comfortable with the IA and US Soldiers in their neighborhoods. The citizenry has also been able to see the results of recent targeted strikes that have removed key insurgent leaders and intimidators.

As the rest of the brigade combat team prepares for its move to Ramadi, the Spartans will continue their work in Hit, building on their recent successes and looking to the future stability of the Anbar province and Iraq as a whole.



*A Spartan stands next to a cache of mortars discovered in Hit, Al Anbar Province*





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1-37 AR  
**“BANDITS”**



May has been a busy and exciting month for Task Force 1-37 (Bandits). On May 3rd, the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 3rd Division, Iraqi Army (3/3/3 IA), officially assumed B/1-37's battle space in and around Sinjar, Iraq, marking the successful transition to Iraqi-led security in the area. Two weeks later, on May 13th, 1/3/3 IA conducted a battalion-sized operation as part of an exercise validating its ability to operate independently of US Forces in and around Rabiya, Iraq. The battalion executed a cordon and search without any major issues. As a result, it is will assume the lead from US Forces in early June. With two of the three Iraqi Army battalions in Western Nineveh capable of planning and executing missions, they will be able to maintain stability in the region without US assistance. Meanwhile, the task force received an order to relocate to Ramadi, Iraq, in Al Anbar Province. Due to the impending change of mission, the Bandits spent the middle of the month packing gear and equipment and training for the more intense combat they were likely to see in Ramadi. They simultaneously conducted a relief-in-place with elements of the 172nd Stryker Brigade. The transfer of authority took place on May 15, and by May 22, the entire task force had vacated Sinjar and was en route to Ramadi. The majority of Soldiers had to travel by ground along a dangerous route plagued by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and small arms attacks, but the convoys negotiated the movement without incident. By the end of the month, all Soldiers, with the exception of those working for brigade or part of the trail party, had arrived at FOB Ramadi, prepared to fight the enemies of our nation in the surrounding area.

During their first week at FOB Ramadi, the Bandits are adjusting to the increasing temperatures and temporarily crowded living conditions while preparing themselves physically and mentally for the fight ahead. The FOB itself has many of the amenities that FOB Nimur, in Sinjar, lacked. For example, US contractors run the large dining facility and ensure the shower trailers and latrines are functioning and sanitary. An AAFES-operated PX gives Soldiers a chance to buy necessary toiletries and comfort items instead of being dependent on those back home. And clean clothes returned from the laundry facility actually smell like they have been washed with detergent, instead of just soaked in boiling water! These amenities give soldiers the opportunity to focus on the mission at hand. At the moment, that mission is to learn as much as possible from the units leaving Ramadi after a yearlong tour. One unit, 1st Battalion, 172nd Armor, Vermont National Guard, has been particularly helpful in familiarizing the task force with its new AO. The weeks and months ahead pose a significant challenge for the Bandits, but they are prepared to accomplish the mission and live up to their storied history. Bandits do not fail those with whom they serve!





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2-37 AR  
**"IRON DUKES"**



The Iron Duke soldiers have been extremely busy this month, continuing to patrol in Tal Afar, but still taking the time to rotate through ranges to keep their skills sharp. The soldiers maintain proficiency in their weapon systems through continual training, and even get the opportunity to train on new weapons.



1LT Larry Steward, Aggressor Red platoon leader, talks to his soldiers about the importance of working with the Iraqi Police. "The Iraqi Security Forces are the future of Iraq, and the way we work with them and treat them on a day to day basis will either set them up for success or for failure." Many of the missions his platoon goes on are joint patrols with either the Iraqi Army or with the Iraqi Police.



Aggressor Red platoon, attached to Team Warrior, pauses for a photo opportunity before their brief for a joint patrol with the Iraqi Police.

The Mortar Platoon of 2-37 takes a moment out from guarding the Castle of Tal Afar to read poetry to each other by fireside in the Dragon's Lair.



LT Gutierrez, with the help of his interpreter, explains the curfew policy to the neighbors in the local Tal Afar neighborhood.



This month has been a month of good-bye's for many of the task force. CPT Marvin Atchinson left Charlie Company and was replaced by CPT Tim Ferguson



SGT Zwiebel leaves the Dukes to attend Warrant Officer Candidate School.



1SG Evans left the task force to attend the Sergeant Major's Academy.





# READY FIRST BRIGADE NEWSLETTER

2-3 FA  
**“GUNNERS”**



## ***“Iraqi forces take the lead”***

AL KASIK, Iraq—

By 1LT Joshua McKenna



*LTC Harrington sits with the 3/1/3 IA battalion staff during the May VALOPS in Al Kasik training camp.*

May marked a momentous month, most would say. TF 2-3 “Gunnery” completed successful validation operations (VALOPS) with 3rd Battalion, 1st Brigade, 3rd Iraqi Army (3/1/3 IA BN) in a step towards handing over the Zumar region to the Iraqi Battalion.

The purpose of the VALOPS was to assess how the Iraqi battalion operated after their Coalition training, as well as giving guidance in specific areas such as logistics, communication and staff work. Learning how to properly execute a cordon and search was challenging, but teaching the support role and staff work was even more taxing. Most Iraqi soldiers just want to be infantry, but have now learned how important it is to fill the ranks of those who support the war-fighter.

Training the Iraqi people is why we’re here—letting them take the lead, and giving them the guidance they need to take control of their country is essential, and that’s exactly what we did. It’s a great accomplishment to see the results of your labor. The Gunnery can pat their backs, job well done, and know that we’re giving Iraq back to their people, piece by piece.

TF 2-3 will conduct a Transition of Authority (TOA) Ceremony with 3/1/3 IA BN on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006 and hand over the Zumar region, making history and taking steps towards giving Iraq back to the Iraqi people.

## ***“Assassins get new leadership”***

RABI’ AH, Iraq—

By CPT David Dickamore

Well, it has been a fast and furious 17 months but my time is up, and I had to relinquish command over to CPT Lucas R. Connolly on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2006. I am sad to leave the Assassins, for we have made tremendous strides through three Grafenwoehr gunnery rotations, two Hohenfels CMTTC rotations and deployment to Rabi’ah, Iraq.

I will take all the precious memories with me to my new job in the Gunner operations center as the assistant operations officer, or as a battalion liaison officer (LNO) with the Marines. I want to thank all the Soldiers, NCOs and officers for what they do every day. You are all truly great warriors and I couldn’t be prouder than I am today.

Assassins, you are the best - continue your outstanding performance through the remainder of your tour here in Iraq. I want to thank all the wives and families who are waiting for their loved ones. You put up with a lot and your support for all the Assassin Soldiers is greatly appreciated. Commanders and Command Sergeants Major have commented that Assassins must have the best FRG after they see the shelves full of toiletries and the boxes of goods for our Soldiers.

Continue to take care of each other. I am happy to have been a small part of a great family of Soldiers, NCOs, officers and family members. I will miss everyone. See you on the horizon!





# READY FIRST BRIGADE NEWSLETTER

## 16 ENGINEER “CATAMOUNTS”

By SPC Rebekah Peterson and 1LT Cecelia Orlando



Critical to any mission is the support it receives behind the scenes. The diverse mission tasking of the 16th Engineer Battalion and 1BCT requires diverse support teams. The Civil Military Operations Team and the maintenance team provide such support to the task force through their diligence, consistency, and hard work. Both teams are always ready at a moment's notice to move out and support Task Force Catamount.

Helping to establish a viable economic environment is critical to establishing a safe and secure environment for the people in the Western Ninewa Province. The Civil Military Operations section of the 16th Engineer Battalion helps make this possible. The team is composed of Captain Dale Caswell and SFC Jason Cvikich. The critical task of their mission is coordinating between the Iraqi Government, the Army, and NGO's to ensure that adequate funding is available and the operations run smoothly.

Since their arrival in Tal Afar back in February, they have overseen the allocation of nearly \$7.5 million in projects to improve the region. Operation

Plowshare is an ongoing operation aimed at developing agriculture, water, transportation, and the economy in Ninewa. The operation is a joint civilian and military effort that employs Army Engineers as well as Iraqi organizations. In

the city of Tal' Afar, the program is working to improve healthcare and education, to include an adult literacy program. The most successful project, to date, brought water to the people of the town of Rabiya. A program begun by 3 ACR called "Wheelchairs for Iraq" provided 120 wheelchairs to Iraqis in need.

Future projects for the 16th Engineer CMO Team aspire to strengthen the infrastructure of the Ninewa Province through providing larger areas with water treatment facilities, granary refurbishing, electricity distribution, and healthcare systems. The coordinations made by the CMO Team support the efforts of making a safer and more stable operating environment for the soldiers patrolling the roads.

A part of the 16th Engineer Battalion's base defense mission is providing recovery assets to vehicles that break down inside and outside of FOB Sykes. As a mobility asset, a unit's recovery team is invaluable. The Catamount Maintenance Section is headed by SGT McSwain and SGT Acuria along with six other maintenance soldiers. They use either the HEMTT Wrecker or M88 Recovery Vehicle depending on the situation. The team is on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week to assist whenever the self recovery of a vehicle is not possible. Before heading out, they need to know what kind of vehicle is inoperable and what may be wrong with it. The HEMTT wrecker and M88 are inspected weekly and prior to heading out to ensure all proper equipment is loaded and functional.

One of the most important things they need to have ahead of time is extra fuel because they never know how far they may have to go. Ideally, it should take thirty minutes to one hour to recover a vehicle. Recently the recovery team had to convoy approximately two and one half hours away to recover a PLS vehicle and bring it back to the FOB Sykes for maintenance. Due to their excellent preparation and thorough PMCS routine they were ready to roll out in under an hour and completed the mission to standard. It's the small things that these soldiers do that enable the smooth recovery of disabled vehicles in the

AO.





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## 501 FSB "PROVIDERS"



The 501<sup>st</sup> Forward Support Battalion played an integral role in the Ready First Combat Team's mission success in Tal Afar, Iraq. Comprehensive supply, fix, arm, and man coverage kept the war fighter fortified ever since taking control from 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR. By laying a strong foundation of anticipatory support, the Providers enabled First Brigade to transition Tal Afar and its outlying communities to the 172<sup>nd</sup> Striker Brigade Combat Team.

Alpha Company soldiers stand ready to accomplish new challenges that come our way. This month the Gators continued to provide seamless direct support (DS) supply to the RFCT through numerous convoys and physical improvements on FOB Sykes. It is beyond belief how our soldiers transformed a mediocre Class I Yard, service support area (SSA) and ammunition holding area (AHA) into a top notch, very well run RFCT support asset. This month the III/ V Platoon also led a reflexive fire range, continuing to improve our Soldier's confidence and abilities with their individual weapons. The company is especially grateful to the "Mighty Gator FRG" for the incredible care package we received. We truly appreciate all that you do.

The RFCT also continues to benefit from the 501<sup>st</sup> FSB's expertise in direct support maintenance. All of the Bravo Company shops saw plenty of business from the supported units and are doing outstanding work in maintaining and fixing key systems crucial for the unit's upcoming change in mission. The Blacksmiths look to continue to build and sustain the brigade's combat power and overall maintenance posture. Since arrival in Iraq, the Blacksmiths completed well over 1000 jobs for the RFCT.

For the Charlie Company, it has been a tremendous two months. The Cobras are tactically trained, prepared, and mentally ready to reposition within Iraq for new challenges. A highlight for the company came from 1LT Natalie MacAnarney. "1LT Mac" received a coveted USAREUR Commanding General's coin from General David D. McKiernan for her actions of performing a critical chest tube insertion to save an injured Iraqi's life here on FOB Sykes. 1LT MacAnarney's actions are one of the numerous examples where the Cobras are performing at their best and setting new standards for combat medical care. To the "Cobra Family" thank you once again for your dedication and support for our Soldiers while they continue to treat and sustain the fighting strength of the Ready First Combat Team – it's Soldiers.

The Headquarters and Headquarters company is using this time to turn over its operation of the Brigade Detainee Internment Facility (BDIF) to a new unit. The brigade's success in Tal Afar is due in large part to HHC's commitment to detainee operations. Through hard work and an organized system of detainee processing, the BDIF was able to process over 600 individuals of interest through the facility.

As the brigade and battalion transitions to a new mission, basic Soldier skills, the core of what we do, comes back into the spotlight. As "warriors first, and Logisticians always", the battalion will surmount any challenge and continue to support and sustain all Ready First Soldiers.





# READY FIRST BRIGADE NEWSLETTER

BDE Chaplain

Chaplain Mike Wood



## **"The only refuge from Him is in Him"**

Chaplain Major Wood

The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness.

Nahum 1:7-8

This verse offers a contrast. On the one hand, God is good and a stronghold to those who trust in Him. On the other he is to be greatly feared by his enemies. Many people have difficulty with "the God of the Old Testament." He is an angry God, a God of vengeance and wrath. It seems that the response that he desires is fear. While the "God of the New Testament" seems gentle and gracious.

The fact is, both images are true. These two sides of God do not contradict, but compliment each other. Nahum captures both sides in the verse above. John, in the New Testament also captures both aspects when he says that Jesus came "full of grace and truth." The same God who is holy and just is also merciful and gracious. (When you figure out how He is able to be both at once, you have drawn near to the Kingdom, to understanding Him and relating to Him.)

The truth is we have reason to fear God. "There is none righteous, no not one." "All we like sheep have gone astray." "Friendship with the world is enmity toward God." We have all rebelled against our Creator at some point and He would be perfectly justified in punishing us. Where do we find refuge from a God who is justly angry with us? The only refuge from Him is in Him.

Scripture tells us "our God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." But it also tells us to "draw near to God and He will draw near to you." It is paradoxical that we approach the fire of His holiness in order to find refuge from His wrath. We can only approach through another great paradox; He paid the price (for our sin) which He Himself demanded.

The knowledge of our shortcomings and unworthiness should not drive us from God. Rather it should drive us to God. We must throw ourselves on the mercy of the Judge, and trust that the price He paid was sufficient for our debt. Draw near to Him and seek refuge in the shadow of His wing.





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## THE MONTH IN PICTURES

